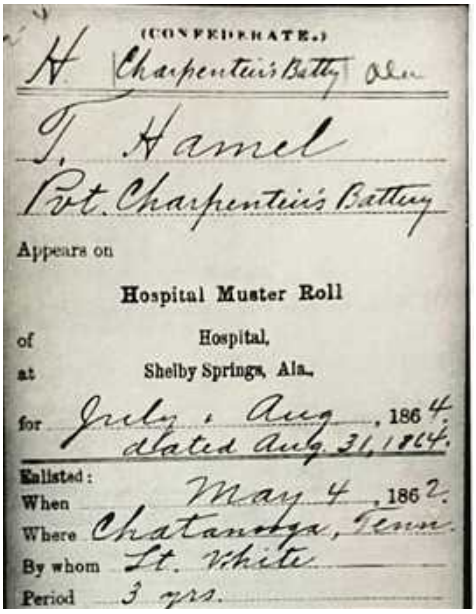
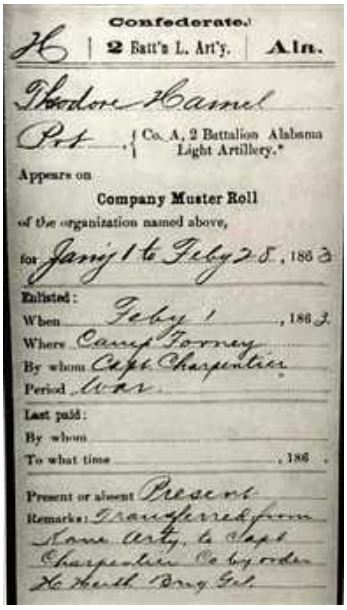
Retro 33: Br. Hugh Hamel, a Feisty Solider for Christ

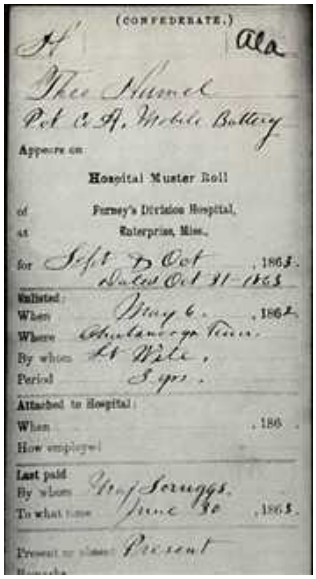
For most Brothers, the Civil War brought a variety of hardships such as doing without certain amenities, eating very simple meals, and difficulty traveling. But for Brother Hugh (1836-1908), it meant much more. Br. Arthur (Theodore) Hamel, a brash young man in his twenties stationed in Mobile, Alabama, when the war began, spoke out forcefully about his sympathies for the North. The provincial superior decided for Brother's own safety to transfer him to work at the Brothers' orphanage in Bardstown, Kentucky. Ironically, Southern soldiers stopped Br. Hugh on his way there and conscripted him into the Confederate Army in spite of his vociferous protests.

Hamel Theodore
Co. A, 2 Batt'n Alabama Light Artillery.
(Confederate.)
Private Private
CARD NUMBERS.

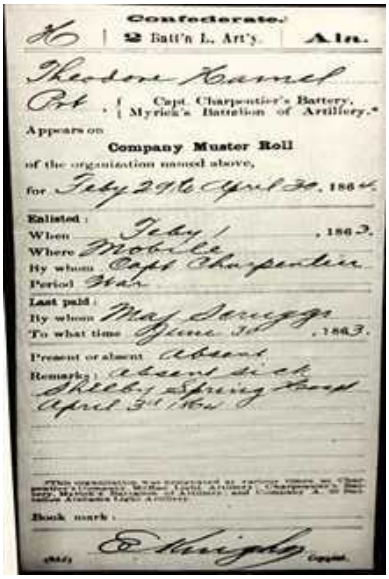

(CONFEDERATE.)
A Charpentier's Battty Ala
T. Hamel
Pvt. Charpentier's Battery
Appears on
Hospital Muster Roll
of Hospital,
at Shelby Springs, Ala.,
for July 1 Aug , 1864.
dated Aug 31, 1864.
Enlisted:
When May 4 , 1862.
Where Chattanooga, Tenn.
By whom Lt. White
Period 3 yrs.


Confederate.
H | 2 Batt'n L. Art'y. | Ala.
Theodore Hamel
Pvt. Co. A, 2 Battalion Alabama Light Artillery.*
Appears on
Company Muster Roll
of the organization named above,
for Jany 1 to Feby 28, 1863
Enlisted:
When Feby 1 , 1863.
Where Camp Forney
By whom Capt. Charpentier
Period War
Last paid:
By whom
To what time , 186
Present or absent Present
Remarks: Transferred from Kans. Arty. to Capt Charpentier Co by order H. Genl. Brg. Gel.

Records in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. show that Private Theodore Hamel (Br. Hugh's civil name) was "enlisted" on May 4, 1862 for three years at Chattanooga, Tennessee. Assigned to the Kansas Artillery, in early 1863 he was transferred to Company A, 2nd Battalion of the Alabama Light Artillery under Captain Charpentier at Camp Forney near Tyler, Texas. Camp Forney functioned initially a training camp, then as a POW camp for Union soldiers, and later as a hospital. In all likelihood, even though Private Theodore was assigned to an artillery battalion, he most probably never held a weapon. Most likely, he was assigned menial work around camp. Records reveal that most of his time as a soldier in the army was spent in hospitals.

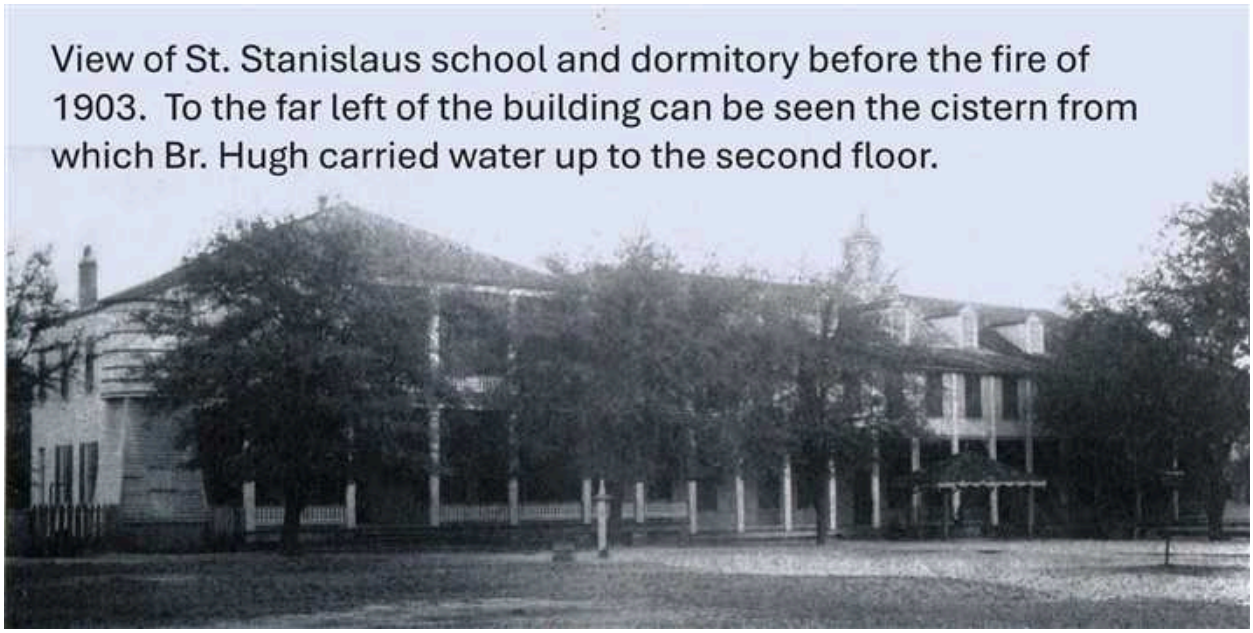

(CONFEDERATE.)
A Ala
Theo Hamel
Pvt Co A, Mobile Battery
Appears on
Hospital Muster Roll
of Forney's Division Hospital,
at Enterprise, Miss.
for Sept 1 to Oct , 1863.
dates Oct 31 1863
Enlisted:
When May 4 , 1862.
Where Chattanooga Tenn.
By whom Lt White,
Period 3 yrs.
Attached to Hospital:
When , 186
How employed
Last paid
By whom Maj Scruggs.
To what time June 30 , 1863.
Present or absent Present
Remarks

Confederate.
H | 2 Batt'n L. Art'y. | Ala.
Theodore Hamel
Pvt , Capt. Charpentier's Battery.*
Appears on
Company Muster Roll
of the organization named above,
for Sept 1 to Oct 31, 1863.
Enlisted:
When Feby 1 , 1863.
Where Mobile
By whom Capt Charpentier
Period War
Last paid:
By whom Maj Scruggs
To what time June 30 , 186
Present or absent Absent
Remarks: Sick in Hospital


Confederate.
H | 2 Batt'n L. Art'y. | Ala.
Theodore Hamel
Pvt Capt. Charpentier's Battery, Myrick's Battalion of Artillery.*
Appears on
Company Muster Roll
of the organization named above,
for Feby 28 to April 30, 1864.
Enlisted:
When Feby 1 , 1863.
Where Mobile
By whom Capt Charpentier
Period War
Last paid:
By whom Maj Scruggs
To what time June 30 , 1863.
Present or absent Absent
Remarks: Absent sick Shelby Springs Hosp April 30 1864
Book mark:
E. Knight Capt.

By September of 1863, Theodore shows up on the muster rolls for Forney's Division Hospital in Enterprise, Mississippi. Then in April 1864, Theodore was admitted as a patient with a skin disease "*morbus cutis*" to Shelby Springs Soldiers Hospital in central Alabama. There he spent the last years of the war cared for by the Sisters of Mercy until he was furloughed May 5, 1865. His name appears on the Prisoners of War roll of those pardoned on May 15, 1865, at Meridian, Mississippi.

Released from the hospital, Theodore rejoined the Brothers of the Sacred Heart and remade his novitiate. In 1876, Br. Hugh was assigned to St. Stanislaus in Bay St. Louis. There he labored for the Lord for 32 years doing janitorial work at the college. In charge of maintaining the second floor dormitory, he spent most of his days making beds, sweeping floors, and carrying buckets of water for the wash basins. There was no plumbing back then, so he had to carry water from a cistern behind the building up the stairs to the second floor. He was thrilled in 1888 when the college dug two artesian wells with enough pressure to pump good, sweet water up to the second floor.


View of St. Stanislaus school and dormitory before the fire of 1903. To the far left of the building can be seen the cistern from which Br. Hugh carried water up to the second floor.

Br. Hugh remained a feisty character most of his life. A small nervous man with a lot of pent-up energy, he stood his ground. Frequently if students or even Brothers carelessly left shoes or clothing on the galleries that he was assigned to sweep, he simply swept them away! He was forever fighting battles of policy and was usually beaten, but never conquered. Br. Hugh did mellow with age, however, becoming a religious man of faith, piety, and even meekness. He died in 1908 in Bay St. Louis five years after the fire of 1903 destroyed the school and dormitory where he had labored so zealously.